



Photos by David R. Lutman, Special to The Courier-Journal

David Veech, executive director of The Institute for Lean Systems, worked with the managers of Rev-A-Shelf, a cabinet hardware and accessories manufacturer in the Bluegrass Industrial Park. Veech was instructing them on the Toyota lean manufacturing method.

Teaching how to be lean

Institute coaches in the workplace

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David Veech knows that life is supposed to be hard for startups. But for The Institute for Lean Systems, it didn't happen that way.

"Not like most small businesses, where they really struggle to get going, we hit the ground and started running, and before you knew it, the schedule was full," said Veech, executive director of the training and consulting firm.

The Louisville-based company started in 2006 and now boasts an international client list and nearly \$3 million in annual sales.

The one thing it lacks is a sizable business base in its home state.

"That's my biggest beef," Veech said. "I grew up in Louisville. I'm a Louisville boy born and raised, and it's my favorite city on the planet ... but I don't have any clients in Kentucky that are regular revenue-producing clients."

That may be doubly odd because ILS, as the company tags itself, bases its business coaching practices on one of Kentucky's most prominent companies: Toyota, which pioneered lean manufacturing methods.

Veech studied the Toyota production system at the Uni-



Veech led a lean-systems class of managers at Rev-A-Shelf. His company teaches methods pioneered by Toyota, where the production system doesn't just affect manufacturing operations, it affects everything its employees do. "It's the glue that holds the whole organization together."

versity of Kentucky, where he managed the lean certification program at the university's Center for Manufacturing. In 2006, he and two other members of the UK team, Jon Yingling and Joachim Knuf, broke away from the university and joined two former graduate students, Ray Littlefield and Parthi Damodaraswamy, as partners in the new venture.

ILS isn't the only company that teaches the Toyota methods, which emphasize strategies such as just-in-time delivery, teamwork, worker empowerment and other measures aimed at more effi-

cient operations, Veech said.

"But what makes us different from the thousand other manufacturing-consulting firms out there is that we have a cultural anthropologist (Knuf) and an industrial psychologist (Veech) on the team, and we really focus on how to make those lean tools that everybody else teaches work for people," he said.

Knuf and Veech, a doctoral candidate in organizational and educational psychology, try to figure out what makes a workplace tick and how it can be optimized. Knuf, the director of

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